



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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SPENCE LEADS DELEGATION TO MACEDONIA

(Ramstein Air Force Base, Germany) April 9 – Today, U.S. Representative Floyd Spence, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, led the first congressional delegation to visit Macedonia since the NATO air bombing campaign commenced March 24. The delegation of House Armed Services Committee members – Spence, Saxby Chambliss of Georgia and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina – met with U.S. and NATO officials in Macedonia to discuss Kosovo operations and associated diplomatic, military and humanitarian relief issues. The delegation also spent several hours visiting the Brazda/Stankovic refugee transit camp set up earlier this week to provide food, medical care and temporary shelter to more than 20,000 Kosovar refugees. Brazda/Stankovic is one of four such refugee transit camps in Macedonia.

“The dedication and professionalism being demonstrated by U.S. military and diplomatic personnel throughout the region is remarkable,” said Spence. “Whether conducting the air war or assisting in humanitarian relief efforts, Americans can be proud of their sons and daughters serving in uniform. I am also glad to see non-governmental organizations like CARE and Catholic Relief beginning their relief efforts in earnest. NATO military forces have built and are currently running the camps, but with the NGOs arriving on the scene, the military can hopefully get out of the day-to-day humanitarian relief efforts.”

“The humanitarian tragedy caused by President Milosevic’s systematic campaign of terror is staggering,” Spence continued. “Yet, what we see in the refugee camps may only be the ‘tip of the iceberg’ relative to what we are likely to learn in the months ahead about the deadly results of Milosevic’s ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. NATO’s humanitarian response to the refugee crisis has been essential and has surely saved thousands of lives.”

Prior to arriving in Macedonia, the delegation stopped in Naples, Italy, for discussions with Admiral James O. Ellis, NATO’s Commander in Chief of Allied Forces Southern Europe, as well as in Brussels, Belgium, for a meeting with General Wesley K. Clark, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

Spence expressed serious concerns over recent threatening statements – reminiscent of the Cold War – made by Russian President Boris Yeltsin. “On-going operations in the Balkans will continue to degrade our over-extended military’s readiness and its ability to respond to more serious threats to U.S. national interests around the world.”

Several days of high level discussions, as well as the visit to Macedonia, raised further questions in Spence's mind concerning the clarity of U.S. and NATO military and diplomatic objectives and the impact the on-going crisis could have on the alliance. "While I agree with those who would argue that NATO cannot afford to 'lose,' unfortunately 'not losing' does not constitute a viable strategy or policy. As NATO prepares to escalate the air war, the absence of clearly defined objectives, including a definition of what constitutes 'success,' as well as uncertainty over the extent of the U.S. military commitment in the months and years ahead, is deeply troubling. It appears that NATO and the U.S. may be headed for a more extensive, higher risk, and longer-term military commitment in the Balkans. I do not support the deployment of American combat troops in Kosovo, and I do not believe the American people are prepared for the inevitable consequences of a ground war in the Balkans if it comes to pass," concluded Spence.

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